

Lesson 8
Acts 8:1-40
A CHURCH ON THE MOVE

Memory Verse: “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.” (Acts 8:4 NIV)

There is one thing stronger than all the armies in the world,” wrote Victor Hugo, “and that is an idea whose time has come.” The gospel of Jesus Christ is much more than an idea. The gospel is “the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16 NKJV). It is God’s “dynamite” for breaking down sin’s barriers and setting the prisoners free. Its time had come and the church was on the move. The “salt” was now leaving the “Jerusalem saltshaker” to be spread over all Judea and Samaria, just as the Lord had commanded (Acts 1:8).

This chapter introduces one man, Saul and provides a transition to what follows later concerning Saul’s conversion and subsequent ministry. As a zealous persecutor, Saul’s active approval of Stephen’s execution reveals his commitment to the extermination of Jesus’ disciples, which he proceeded to implement zealously.

The book of Acts and the Epistles give sufficient data for a sketch of Saul’s early life. He was born in Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 22:3), a “Hebrew of the Hebrews” (see 2 Cor. 11:22; Phil. 3:5), the “son of a Pharisee” (Acts 23:6), and a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37; 22:25–28). He was educated in Jerusalem by Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) and became a devoted Pharisee (Acts 26:4–5; Phil. 3:5). Measured by the law, his life was blameless (Phil. 3:6). He was one of the most promising young Pharisees in Jerusalem, well on his way to becoming a great leader for the Jewish faith (Gal. 1:14).

Saul’s zeal for the law was displayed most vividly in his persecution of the church (Gal. 1:13–14; Phil. 3:6). He really thought that persecuting the believers was one way of serving God, so he did it with a clear conscience (2 Tim. 1:3). He obeyed the light that he had, and, when God gave him more light, he obeyed that and became a Christian!

When Christ spoke to Saul on the Damascus road, He compared him to a beast (Acts 9:5)! He persecuted both men and women “unto the death” (Acts 22:4), entering both houses and synagogues (Acts 22:19). He had the believers imprisoned and beaten (Acts 22:19; 26:9–11). If they renounced their faith in Jesus Christ (“compelling them to blaspheme”—Acts 26:11), they were set free; if they did not recant, they could be killed.

In later years, Paul described himself as “exceedingly mad against them” (Acts 26:11), “a blasphemer [he denounced Jesus Christ], and a persecutor, and injurious [violent]” (1 Tim. 1:13). He was a man with great authority whose devotion to Moses completely controlled his life, and almost destroyed his life. He did it “ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim. 1:13), and God showed him mercy and saved him. Saul of Tarsus is the last person in Jerusalem you would have chosen to be the great apostle to the Gentiles!

We will learn more about three other different men in this chapter.

Scriptural Reading: Acts 8:3-8; 13-24; 27-39.

Things to learn: 1) A Faithful Preacher 2) A Clever Deceiver 3) A Concerned Seeker

Questions

Q1. What can we tell from Acts 8: 4-8 about Philip who was one of the seven men chosen to serve in Acts 6:5?

Q2. What can we learn about Simon (In Acts 8:9-24) who claimed to be a believer and followed Philip wherever he went?

Q3. What kind of seeker of the Truth was the Ethiopian as recorded in Acts 8:26-40 and how did he come to faith?